PRESS RELEASE

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ASIA-PACIFIC COALITION FOR EAST TIMOR

APCET CELEBRATES FIRST ANNIVERSARY

Exactly a year ago today, the Filipino people stood up as one nation for the rights of the East Timorese people.

The Asia-Pacific Conference on East Timor, or APCET as it was more popularly known then, was staged at the University of the Philippines despite tremendous pressure from the Indonesian and Philippine governments to scuttle it.

An eleventh-hour Supreme Court decision overturned a lower court restraining order for organizers to cancel APCET. But conference officals led by APCET convenors' chair Renato Constantino, Jr. and APCET coordinator Gus Miclat had even vowed to defy the lower court's order inviting court contempt and probable arrest.

Constantino and Miclat led more than a hundred victorious foreign and local APCET delegates to proceed with the conference that riled Indonesia and pushed Philippine foreign policy in near shambles.

The conference has since led to the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Coalition for East Timor, also called APCET. It has affiliates all over the region with the Filipino convenors transforming into the Philippine Solidarity for East Timor and Indonesia (PHILSETI).

The conference was organized to call attention to the escalating human rights violations in that tiny, yet oil-rich Catholic nation. Over 200,000 East Timorese -- one fourth of its entire population -- have died or been killed since Indonesia invaded the former Portuguese colonial territory in 1975.

East Timor was thrust anew into the international limelight in 1991 following a massacre of funeral marchers which was caught in film by an English cameraman.

Prior to the tragedy, East Timor has almost never been heard of in the predominantly Catholic Filipino nation and in other Southeast Asian countries.

APCET changed all these.

On June 2 parallel activities among APCET affiliates will ensue. A celebration cum reunion will be held among the Filipino convenors and supporters at the 70's Bistro on featuring local artists Noel Cabangon, Bayang Barrios, Bagong Dugo and other guest performers. A video showcasing the last conference will also be shown as messages from East Timorese leaders will be delivered.

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